

SUMMARY OF POSSIBLE MANATEE DEATHS RELATED TO IN-WATER CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES

There is reason to suspect some manatee deaths have resulted from in-water dredging, construction, or blasting activities. There are no provisions for incidental take for these types of activities in Section 7(b)(4) of the Endangered Species Act. Most cases listed below, however, are unconfirmed and are based on circumstantial evidence. There are four confirmed cases where a manatee has been crushed by a barge and/or fatally wounded by a tugboat during operation (M8, MEC9547, UCF9041, M155). Because of the fear of reporting such accidents, it is assumed that the actual number may be higher. Although circumstances in most incidences are probably accidental, current laws relating to injury to manatees do not require intent by the injuring party. Liability, however, is determined on a case-by-case basis, and no legal action was taken in any of these cases. It is important to learn about how these accidents happen, in order to develop best operating procedures to avoid future accidents. The best way to learn about these incidences is for the operators to report them.

In one case (MEC9547), manatee observers were present and stopped the barge in shallow water for about 20 minutes while a group of about 10 manatees proceeded to swim away. The barge was then moved east another 100 ft. and left overnight. When the crew moved the barge the next morning, a manatee rolled out from underneath and was found dead. This crew was working on overhead powerlines immediately adjacent to a power plant discharge.

While it appears that most known in-water work injuries are a result of watercraft injuries, one undetermined death (M77) was unusual in that an exposed flipper bone was found, suggesting an unknown injury prior to death. Although the animal was badly decomposed, it was determined that the right flipper was broken and dislocated at the "elbow". This animal was found near channel dredging activities.

One carcass where the cause of death was categorized as other human-related (M8505), was discovered at a construction site, and appeared to have drowned in construction debris, found entangled in a net. Another carcass where the cause of death was watercraft collision (KDL8857) was found inside a silt screen.

The death of one animal (M19) may have been a result of blasting activities. The activities occurred in a manatee transit route to and from the ocean in the St. Johns River. Workers at Atlantic Marina, adjacent to the blasting, felt certain that the blasts were implicated in the manatee's death. One worker said he was knocked off a platform when a charge went off several days earlier. The animal was too decomposed to either verify or refute their conclusions.

(DRAFT) LISTING:

- Manatee Case #: M8
Date: March 20, 1975
Location: Marker 43, Withlacoochee River, Levy County
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: Animal may have collided with a barge on the river.
- Manatee Case #: M19
Date: March 19, 1976
Location: Next to Atlantic Marina, Hecksher Drive at Sister Creek, Duval;
Cause of Death: Undetermined, decomposed
Comments: Dynamite was being used in the area to clear St. Johns River. The death of the animal may possibly have been caused by damage due to underwater shockwaves.
- Manatee Case #: M77
Date: April 18, 1977
Location: East side of Rattlesnake Island, one half mile south of Ft. Matanzas, Matanzas River, Crescent Beach, St. Johns County
Cause of Death: Undetermined
Comments: Animal was found near site of channel dredging activities
- Manatee Case #: M155
Date: June 5, 1979
Location: At intake canal at FPL, west shore of Indian River, Frontenac, Brevard County
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: Captain of tug reported he felt a bump on the propellers and hull of the boat as if he had hit something
- Manatee Case #: M169
Date: August 23, 1979
Location: One half kilometer north of NASA parkway, west shore of Banana River, Kennedy Space Center, Brevard County
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: Probable collision when dredging the Turning Basin by work boat shuttle for crews, (pers. comm. John Outland, OIP, personal experience with project).

Manatee Case #: M8505
Date: February 4, 1985
Location: At construction site located at the junction of FPL effluent canal and ICW, Port Everglades, Broward County
Cause of Death: Other Human Related
Comments: Carcass found entangled in net at the construction site. Probably caught in net and drowned.

Manatee Case #: M8704
Date: January 27, 1987
Location: East side of St. Lucie locks, St. Lucie canal, Martin County
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: Heavy barge activity at I-95 overpass construction site just east of St. Lucie locks.

Manatee Case #: KDL8857
Date: September 26, 1988
Location: Near culvert of golf course, end of canal at intersection of Murphy Rd. and Pine Tree Lane, Stuart, Martin County
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: Carcass found inside silt screen.

Manatee Case #: KDL8950
Date: October 20, 1989
Location: North side of NASA causeway, west of the causeway bridge in Banana River, Cape Canaveral, Brevard County
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: Crushed either in a canal lock or between a barge and dock, don't know for certain. Animal lived for several weeks following injury.

Manatee Case #: UCF9041
Date: March 21, 1990
Location: East side of canal locks in Port Canaveral, Banana River, Brevard
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: This was a witnessed barge crush.

Manatee Case #: MEC9547
Date: December 4, 1995
Location: Under powerlines on the north side of FPL stack, Port St. Johns, Indian River, Brevard County
Cause of Death: Watercraft collision
Comments: FPL barge operator contacted FMP, concerned that the barge may be responsible for crushing the animal.